

[The Life of Mike Pelletier]

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[?] [1938-9?]

Maine

Living Lore

Old Town - 39

(The Life of Mike Pelletier)

Mike: "Well, my name is Magloire Pelletier. I suppose that sentence ought to be at the first end of the story instead of the last end, but it's better late than never. Like is a nickname that they call me for short. My last name is Pelletier, but sometimes I spell it Pelky. Mitchell is just the English way of sayin' my first name.

Bill Rioux: "They'll think Mike is Chinese, puttin' the first part of his story last."

Mrs. Pelletier: "Well, I guess I was to blame for that. We thought that mistake was very funny."

Mike: "It was funny, all right. Now that social that was given for Father Ouillette was given to mark his twenty years as a priest. There must have been seventy-five or a hundred people there and besides those speeches I spoke about, we had a little piano music and my wife and I played the accordians. We had a lunch of coffee, cake, and sandwiches. That stuff was all made by the women of the parish.

"A few weeks ago we had a whist party over there in the convent to raise money for the school. Besides the card playin' we had some movin' pictures. There was a priest

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there from Lewiston, where Father Ouillette came from, and he had one of those home projectors and some moving pictures he'd taken in different places. There were some real good colored pictures of Montreal. One of the scenes showed a parade of priests. That was narrow film, of course. The pictures on the screen were only about four feet square. But they were good.

"That wasn't a clam chowder we had at that grange meeting: it was an oyster stew."

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Mrs. Pelletier: "They always have baked beans at the grange suppers."

Mike: "Yes they do at most of those grange suppers, but down in Hampden that night it was an oyster stew. Besides that there was cake, coffee, baked beans, cold meat sandwiches, pickles, and pie. That food is nearly always home cooked.

"Those stories about buried treasure on the river have been handed down from Captain Kidd's time. In those days there were no dams on the river, and ships could sail pretty well up above Bangor. There were all sorts of stories about how pirate's sailed up this way and buried gold and treasure on the banks. I've heard that sometimes they shot a man and buried him on top of the gold, thinkin' that if the body was disturbed, the treasure would disappear. I've seen those holes myself, where people dug, right down near Webster. I've seen the marks on the rocks that they say were cut by the pirates givin' directions on how and where to dig. Those marks wouldn't help any one now, of course, because they're all in cipher.

"I don't know much about that Old Town Woolen plant except what I've heard or read in the paper. I know they had an auction and they sold all the machinery to people down in Massachusetts. A concern down there has an option on the plant, and they may start some kind of manufacturing there. That would look like a poor place for a powder mill to

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me. I don't think they ever have them right in town. If it blew up there'd be a lot of people killed."

Bill Rioux: "There was a powder mill blew up over in Japan a few days ago. There was a couple of hundred people killed."

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Mike: "I don't think they'd allow a powder mill right in the city. The best place for one of those is out in the country. Out Greenville way would be a lot better. I don't know anything at all about airplanes, and whether that would be a good place or not for an airplane factory, I couldn't say. You can tell them, though, I said the people in this town don't care what kind of business starts up there as long as something does start.

"None of my children learned to play the accordian except Bernice. She could play a few pieces on it. The girls all learned to play the piano, though. Clara, Bernice, and Alberta.

"That French Settlement is two miles west of Old Town. There's just a few farms there and a small school. That was called French Settlement because just French lived there. The Merciers, Paradis, Cotes, Martins, and so forth. They broke the ground and made that little settlement a good many years ago. Hogtown, out back of Stillwater, is another little place. A woman that used to live out there used to raise a lot of pigs, and they've called the place 'Hogtown' ever since.

"Do you know how they came to call that lower end of Great Works 'Picketville?' Some people think it must have been because some one named Picket must have lived there, but that's not the case. It's because a lot of the old houses down there were built with pickets instead of havin' boards nailed to the studdin'. You know - ordinary pickets like they use in fences about three inches wide and one inch thick. Of course they were square on the end instead of pointed, and they broke the joints when they nailed them on.

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"Then there's the 'Gold Mine Road' out between Milford and Greenville. It comes out on the county road. That got its name because some people found gold there. Not very much, but they were nuggets and gold sure enough. Baker Brook, out on the Greenville road, was named for a fellow named Baker that used to lumber a lot out that way. Otter Stream, on the Bradley road, was called that because a long time ago there used to be otters there. An otter is something like a seal. There's only one stream there but you cross it three times goin' along that road, and they call them 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Streams. They're all the same one.

"A lot of birch grew along Birch Stream up near Pea Cove. How Sunkhase Stream, out beyond Milford, got its name I don't know. They have a story that a fellow named Hayes was drowned there a long time ago and an Indian brought some whites up to show them where the place was, and he pointed to the water and said, 'sunk Hayes.' Of course you can't tell how much truth there is in stories like that. Maybe it's an Indian name. There's the Jo Pease Rips between Milford and Indian Island, and the 'Cook' (another rips) between Indian Island and Old Town. That 'Cook' was named for a fellow named Cook who used to tote wangan stuff up that way to the booms and drives. How they came to name one of those booms 'Nebraska' I don't know. It must be an Indian name. (I pointed out to Mike that the word 'Nebraska' didn't sound like a local Indian name, and he agreed with that. Personally I think it was called that by river men, in a facetious mood, to signify a place far away.) "Nebraska is on the upper end of the island, and the Argyle boom was on the lower end. There's no doubt that state out west has an Indian name."

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(I mentioned the similiarity of the names of the old Indian game 'spin the Pan' and the one spoken of by Mike, "Spin the Plate," and how Henry Mitchell said how one of the forfeits was "measuring ten yards of ribbon. "Yes", said Mike, "and they used to pay that forfeit here, too. Sometimes it was 'twenty-five yards of ribbon' and they'd have to kiss each other every time they measured a yard."

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The George Gardner mentioned in connection with maple sugar is the local postmaster. He has been prominent in politics here, as a democrat, for a long time. He used to run a store where trunks, suitcases, horse blankets, harness, etc., was sold. One of his boys runs his harness and leather goods repair shop now. George was the tax collector for a long time. He is French, and always signs his name 'desjardins.')

Mike: "Gardner has about 400 trees out there. He sells a lot of maple syrup every year, but I couldn't say just how much he gets from those trees. He doesn't make any sugar to sell, but I guess he makes a little for his own use. He has a sugar house out there, though, and there's no doubt he could make plenty of it if he wanted to, but he gets more sellin' the syrup. Louis Mercier - and he lives out in French Settlement - does some sugar makin', and his father did before him. I can't tell you much about his business, but I know he used to sell maple sugar around here in little birch bark containers. Mercier has about 300 trees out there, but Gardner or Mercier could tell you a lot more about what they do than I could.